



The Rise of Nine by Helianthvs

Category: Stranger Things, 2016

Genre: Friendship, Hurt-Comfort

Language: English

Characters: Max M., Will B.

Status: In-Progress

Published: 2019-04-23 11:03:58

Updated: 2019-04-23 11:03:58

Packaged: 2019-12-12 20:38:24

Rating: T

Chapters: 1

Words: 3,220

Publisher: www.fanfiction.net

Summary: "Friends don't lie," El insisted, mouth pressed to a hard line to emphasize how serious she meant her words. With a limited vocabulary and a pair of lips moving to mouth that statement word for word, Max knew she spoke the truth. Still... "Friends shouldn't lie. But they do. I know they do. Because I can see through them."

The Rise of Nine

A/N: I actually wrote the entire chapter a second time. Length aside, I felt like I needed to flesh out Nine's life before Hawkins a bit more, and give a more descriptive narrative of how her abilities would affect her relationships with the other characters. Spoilers for (mainly) the second season of Stranger Things ahead. Rated for mild cursing and violence. Trigger warning for mentions and depictions of blood, human experimentation, and violence against children.

Inspired by the fic **Maximum Willpower** of **BimeyMooMimey** in AO3.

It has been observed that most children past the age of one would move their attention to the eyes of a speaker when attempting to talk, looking for additional nonverbal cues to read as they already had an idea of how to use their mouths to form sounds that got them what they wanted. A decade past that age, Nine was still known to stare at someone's lips when they spoke, though the scientists did note that she had no issues with communication. It unnerved them sometimes, when they caught her eyes fixated on them, but as it did not seem to affect the experiments done on her, they let her be. The possibly fruitful outcomes of the tests were what mattered to them, not her welfare beyond making sure she was alive and functional enough to produce the results. If she died on them without accomplishing anything, then she could join the other failures in the furnace. It was as simple as that.

Clearly, they were fools. What kind of scientists would forget the scientific method? If they had looked harder into the matter, they might have had a third girl in the Rainbow Room.

Nine, as the number on her wrist would identify her to be, learned at a young age that other people were frustrating to listen to. They would open their mouths and speak, but the sounds she heard were nothing like what she made when she imitated their lip movements. It made learning to speak a lot harder than it should be. Three years after her discovery of that unpleasant feeling, she decided that other

people were weird. Obviously they had problems, not her. She could speak just fine when she ignored their voices and focused on copying their mouths. As with some children, her supposedly novel method of understanding other people made her feel like the smartest person in the room. A fact she might have told them to their face at some point when she was younger. Multiple times.

Then, perhaps ironically, it was at the age of nine when the voice to her right echoed her thoughts of the helmet causing her extreme discomfort, that she had an idea of what was actually going on. Fixing her gaze at the scientist giving her words of false assurance, she confirmed it. A few days of watching more mouths and listening to their voices further cemented it as true. What she heard was what they meant to tell her, and their mouths were weird. With that revelation, the scientists became less weird in her eyes. Again, telling them so didn't seem to make them behave any less weird, or different for the matter.

Them being less weird, however, was the least of her problems in the next four years. Day in and day out, for what seemed to be an eternity for Nine, she was given helmets that seemed to be designed to cave her head in with multiple metal rods. They dropped her into a tank of cold water (at least, she hoped that the long and many words the voice said meant water). She was made to float on salty water (she assumed tanks either carried water or shot people, and no one seemed to be dying near this tank she was put in, which was good for her and them, she guessed). Strange music played in colorful rooms. She watched foreign films without subtitles. Random things were placed on the table in her room, and she was asked to stare at them and try to make them move. Frankly, her straining eyes were more likely to pop out of their sockets.

Eventually, they gave up on the weirder tasks and made her read books. Nine rather enjoyed reading, even if they sometimes asked her to read the words aloud in an empty room, as if expecting the large dragons from the pages to appear before them. It was through this activity that she learned another important concept: truth.

The voices she heard, she understood, tell the truth. They said things as plain and as blunt as words could, not caring for her feelings or the situation they were in. She reached that conclusion when she

tried to imitate them, voicing her opinions on uncomfortable equipment and creepy coats and horrendous hairstyles and shabby socks, meeting expressions that ranged from uncaring to keep-her-room-dark-and-quiet-later. The latter wasn't all that nice a face to see, so she developed some tact after that.

That meant, as a consequence she would assume then, that their lips moved to utter lies. The opposite of the truth.

At twelve years old, she realized that it wasn't always the case. Sometimes the scientists used big words to say the same things as the voices. Other times they tell half-truths, matching the voices until a certain point. She would later deduce that there were truths and lies that were implied in their silence, too, but without a voice to hear and a mouth to read and compare to, she wouldn't understand it as well as what they voice out.

She was twelve and a half when the scientists took her books and their helmets away, leaving her with her biological mother and father just a few months before they signed their divorce papers. Her father was a man with eyes as blue as hers, who let her watch movies on school nights and taught her how to ride a skateboard the day after she expressed interest in the park a few blocks away from the house they lived in. Her mother was just as nice, buying her books and brushing her hair in the morning when she was too sleepy to find the brush, though she worried a lot over the lab her daughter spent half a decade in, going through who knows what that couldn't be said because Nine was made to sign papers that told her not to *or else*.

Ah, right. She should learn to use her actual name, *Maxine*. Honestly, Max sounded better. *Cooler*. Her dad doesn't mind calling her Max, said it was easier. Max was the name she gave the other people in the skate park, too. Three weeks later, she gained the nickname Mad Max. Whether it was because of her *mad skills* on a skateboard or because she took on three boys a head taller than her in a fistfight, one cannot tell.

Despite her mother's words, school was just another place to find books to read. She was no mind reader, but only a complete and utter

dimwit would try to befriend girls who tell her the washroom at the end of the hall was where the next class would be and boys who thought she was weird for riding a skateboard and going to the arcade. So no, she won't accept their wide smiles and offers to show her around the school, thank you very much. A map and the person she met at the front desk were enough for that kind of task. Between herself and her teachers and her parents, she could accomplish most of her assignments with or without her classmates cooperating. Almost dutifully, she ignored voices calling her stuck-up and a loner. Rather than to try and learn geometry using the swirls of a toilet bowl and the vandals on the walls of a bathroom stall.

Her school year had yet to end when her mother remarried. Her stepfather was an honest but intimidating man, who brought along a less honest but just as intimidating son. She was glad not to see them often, having requested to stay with her father when her parents separated. Why her mother chose that man over her former husband, she would not know. They rarely fought over matters and her father did not resent her mother, so perhaps the reason had something to do with an event that occurred when she was still in the lab, and she was just unaware of it.

A week later, she found herself thrown into a vehicle like in the movies. The white coats the perpetrators wore gave their identities away easily. What she did not expect, however, was for her stepfather to be in the van. She did not recall seeing him before, so he either worked in another location or was merely an associate. Given their previous interactions, she believed the latter to be more likely. Tuning into their conversation, not bothering to read their lips from her uncomfortable position on the floor, she understood that they were going against the terms of the divorce and sending her away to a lab in Indiana along with her stepfather and his new family. She would have protested at that point had they not also mentioned retrieving one of her siblings just as she opened her mouth to speak. Retrieve? That implied escaping, not failure. So one of them actually succeeded in what the scientists hoped to achieve, and left before they could perform more tests. Cool. She'd like to meet them, preferably without the white coats in sight. Did they make things move with their mind or pull dragons out of fairytale books? She

wanted to know. Nine could point out the bad guys and the other one could, I don't know, throw a truck at them?

With a fresh new start in whatever middle of nowhere Hawkins was, and to get the scientists off her case before they decided something about her was extraordinary after all, Nine - *it's Maxine dammit* - she decided to change styles. Read less, in public at least, and maybe try to get some friends this time. She couldn't stomach being a goody two-shoes, but she wasn't going to be the stuck-up brat she was said to be before. Mad Max was a cool skater girl from California, who loved arcade games and shouldn't be messed with. She **is** Mad Max. She can be cool, and she'll have friends and beat their high scores and laugh with them while she's at it.

Even if she didn't make it seem like a big deal, she really did want to have friends. Genuine ones she could count on, to the point of trusting their mouths. *No big lies between them, no pretenses or silent untruths or bad secrets.*

Of course, as soon as she entered the classroom and was introduced by the teacher, unpleasant words reached her ears left and right and front, and she knew her plans would be a lot harder to accomplish than she initially thought.

Her luck with everything **not** ordinary seemed to follow her to Indiana, though the scientists and their tests had nothing on the Demogorgon or the Mind Flayer or the Upside Down. It was a wild ride for the Zoomer and the Party, and she crashed her stepbrother's car into a mailbox with someone injured by aforementioned sibling bleeding in the back row and lived to know all that, and more.

In her unspoken quest to make friends - and possibly find her sibling to fight bad guys with - she came across the Party, who in her opinion, were the closest she had to people her age who could pass her requirements for friends. Of course, Jonathan and Nancy were great, and Steve was like the older brother she wished she was related to instead of Billy, but that was a bit different. Joy was alright, too, if not a bit more coddling than Max would like.

Mike and El, the leader of the Party and her escapee sister, respectively, disliked her, and that was mildly putting it into words. Even if their voices matched the movements of their mouth, what she heard wasn't exactly what she would like to hear from those she would count as her friends. Max would insist the feelings were one-sided, though she was rather annoyed - *bitter, angry, sad, confused* - about it. She honestly didn't recall pissing either of them off, ever. Her high scores in the arcade were surely not the cause, she checked, and she was a **Zoomer**, not a replacement Mage. She already made it clear that she wasn't trying to get someone else's spot. She just wanted a place to call her own.

Dustin and Lucas were pretty cool with her, but they acted a bit weird sometimes, and fought each other with her name being thrown in by their voices. When asked, they barely say anything about it to her on the matter, and shut up, their fight tossed aside like dirty socks under a bed instead of in a hamper. Maybe this was the reason Mike disliked her, she would think at some point, and she did harbor some guilt over the possibility of causing their group to argue with each other. She wanted to make friends, not break friends apart, *dammit*.

All in all, the end of the year in her new school was more or less a bust. Her stepfather basically kidnapped her and forced her to live with his family in the middle of nowhere swarming with scientists and monsters. The Party wasn't completely welcoming and her sister hated her for some reason, and while she was considerably a member over what they faced together, she still didn't trust them with *everything*. They were the literal rock and hard place she was caught in between of.

So it should come to no surprise that she would have kissed Will Byers silly for having the nicest voice and mouth combination she had ever known to exist ever on what was probably the entire planet and the fabric of reality itself. Or worshiped the ground he walked on. Wherever his preferences were. They didn't converse much before she was dragged into the Upside Down situation, but had she known what the quiet member of the Party was like, she would have approached him sooner. Much sooner.

Befriending Will was not an easy task. He didn't talk much and he was still quite shaken after the events that involved him getting possessed by the Mind Flayer, and that meant she had to look at his mouth as he spoke. Though he never said anything against it outright, it was obvious to her that he didn't like being stared at, much less given a lot of attention to at any long period of time. For sound reasons. Next time she hears "Zombie Boy" from Troy or whoever, they'll get what's coming for them. Preferably with Steve's bat at hand. Threatening them and targeting their manhood - not that there was much of a *man* in them, per se - was optional but highly encouraged in her opinion.

Still, it was likely that her honesty was winning her more points with him than not. It was times like these that she found her ability useful. It wasn't as amazing or as groundbreaking as the abilities she heard her other siblings possessed, but understanding the words that didn't match the mouthed "I'm fine" and "doing better now" in Will's voice meant she could reach out to him in a way others feared to do, call him out on his bad days and pull him outside to scream at trees when pillows weren't enough to muffle the sound of his self-anger. Unlike the members of the babysitting and coddling eggshell-walking brigade, she had no problem with dragging the truth out of his lips, knowing when he lied, and having developed enough patience sorting out the half-truths and taking answers from his silence. It tested her and her usually short temper, sure, but between her determination and his warm disposition, she managed to snap at him less and got him to speak of things he likely didn't want to bother the others about. He taught her to reign herself in just as she made him let his feelings out. Writing also helped, when his throat tightened and he found it hard to say the words he wanted to. She's read enough to read between the lines, to pick apart paragraphs of fiction like understanding the moral of a story at the end of a fairytale.

Maybe the thing about third times is true. He was a charm in his own nerdy gentle way, a treasure, though she would not wrap him up and hide him away to "protect" him. No, she will not keep him from anything she would not keep herself from. There will be no lies between friends, no pretenses or silent untruths or bad secrets.

Which meant he should know about Nine. He was certainly worthy of

that amount of trust now. She no longer needed to look at him with so much caution to count on his words, spoken and otherwise.

... and what better timing than when she knocked on the front door of his house one bright Saturday morning after the usual breakfast hour, sporting a black eye and neck bruises barely covered by her old sweater? With Jonathan and Joy both out for work, it was Will who answered the door and ushered her inside, voice laced in concern for the girl with a split lip, already walking to the refrigerator to get anything frozen to ice the bruises that likely extended to her stomach. Did she ever mention how much she liked this boy, who knew her injuries to the point of keeping a first aid box under the side of the couch she almost always took when she visited? She would thank her stepbrother for providing this chance for her, you know, if it didn't mean dealing with a lot of pain. She's just glad it took Billy two weeks to get over the tranquilizer incident. Enough time for the wounds she got from the Upside Down to scab over and heal a bit. If he had opened them up, she might have asked Steve for his bat again.

A/N: I sped through the transcripts of season two, and thought to change the circumstances of her arrival to Hawkins to match one of the reports shown in the series, making Max the child who disappeared from San Diego. Which would also explain her dislike of moving to Indiana, seeing as the trip wasn't by her own decision.

On an unrelated note, wouldn't it be interesting if Billy is revealed to be a character with special abilities stemming from his unknown biological mother being an MK Ultra test subject like Terry Ives? Just a random thought I had.